

Message Text

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SUBJECT: RECENT COLUMNS ON SOMALIA BY JOSEPH KRAFT
REF: STATE 098883 (NOTAL)

THE FOLLOWING TWO ARTICLES DATELINED APRIL 16 AND
APRIL 18 RESPECTIVELY ARE REPEATED TO YOU FOR YOUR
INFORMATION:

1. TURNABOUT IN THE HORN

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA - PRESIDENT SIAD BARRE'S SUDDEN TRIP TO
CHINA IS THE ACTION OF A MAN CAUGHT BETWEEN A ROCK AND A
HARD PLACE. HE IS IN BAD TROUBLE, HAVING NOT YET MASTERED
A MILITARY COUP GENERATED BY HIS FAILURE TO TAKE THE OGADEN
PROVINCE OF ETHIOPIA.

HE HAS BURNED HIS BRIDGES WITH THE RUSSIANS, HIS FORMER
ALLIES WHO TURNED ON HIM AND HELPED THE ETHIOPIANS DEFEAT
SOMALI FORCES IN THE OGADEN. THE UNITED STATES HAS SET
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TOUGH CONDITIONS FOR GIVING HIM THE HELP HE NEEDS. SO HIS
VISIT TO CHINA IS A DESPERATE MEASURE.

I ARRIVED IN THIS COUNTRY AT PRECISELY THE MOMENT THE COUP
GOT UNDER WAY -- SIX IN THE MORNING ON APRIL 9. GOVERNMENT
AND U.S. SOURCES TOLD ME REBELLIOUS ARMY UNITS HAD SEIZED
THE RADIO TRANSMITTER AND MADE AN ATTACK AGAINST THE
BARRACKS, FIVE MILES OUTSIDE OF MOGADISHU, WHERE THE
PRESIDENT LIVES.

AROUND 11 IN THE MORNING I DROVE OUT TO VISIT THE BARRACKS WITH TWO EUROPEAN JOURNALISTS. TWO NEW TANKS WERE STATIONED AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE MILITARY CAMP. SOLDIERS ARMED WITH MACHINE GUNS WERE VISIBLE ALONG THE HILLS AROUND THE CAMP. MILITIA HAD ESTABLISHED CHECKPOINTS EVERY 10 YARDS ON THE ROAD NEAR THE CAMP. WE WERE STOPPED AND FRISKED. AT ONE POINT WE SAW AN OFFICER BEING HELD PRISONER BY POLICEMEN.

COMING BACK TO TOWN WE STOPPED AT THE COMPOUND HOUSING THE MARINE DETACHMENT THAT GUARDS THE U.S. EMBASSY. IT IS LESS THAN A QUARTER OF A MILE FROM THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE. ONE OF THE MARINES TOLD ME THAT HE HAD BEEN AWAKENED ABOUT EIGHT BY A "LOUD BLAST." AFTERWARD THERE WERE TANKS MOVING ABOUT, AND SMALL ARMS FIRE. "BY 10 IN THE MORNING," HE SAID, EXPRESSING A VIEW THAT BRIEFLY BECAME DOMINANT, "IT WAS ALL OVER."

BUT SUBSEQUENT EVENTS DEMONSTRATED IT WAS NOT ALL OVER. SECURITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN STEADILY TIGHTENED.

THE MOST OBVIOUS DIFFICULTY IS THAT SOME OF THE REBELS GOT AWAY. RUMOR, WHICH IS NOW RAMPANT, HAS IT THAT UNCLASSIFIED

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A BATTALION OF TANKS AND A BATTALION OF INFANTRY ARE STANDING OUTSIDE THE CITY READY TO ATTACK AGAIN. THEY ARE SAID TO BE UNDER THE COMMAND OF A COLONEL WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MISSILE OPERATIONS IN THE OGADEN CAMPAIGN.

THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF THE ARMY, MOREOVER, REFLECTS LASTING SCARS FROM THE DEFEAT IN THE OGADEN. CASUALTIES ARE ESTIMATED TO HAVE RUN AT ABOUT 50 PERCENT -- SOME 10,000 TO 15,000 MEN.

HALF A DOZEN OFFICERS WERE EXECUTED IN THE FIRST WEEK OF MARCH FOR REFUSING ORDERS TO RETREAT. TWO GENERALS WHO SERVED AS VICE MINISTERS OF DEFENSE DURING THE OGADEN FIGHTING WERE GIVEN NONDEFENSE TASKS IN A MINISTERIAL SHAKE-UP ON APRIL 1. THREE DOZEN MORE MILITARY MEN HAVE REPORTEDLY BEEN EXECUTED SINCE THE COUP.

THE MUTINOUS MOOD OF THE ARMY DOVETAILS WITH GENERAL PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT. HE IS BLAMED FOR GOING ALL OUT AGAINST THE ETHIOPIANS AND THEIR RUSSIAN PATRONS WITHOUT FIRST FIRMLY TYING DOWN AMERICAN SUPPORT.

RESENTMENT OF THE PRESIDENT SEEMS TO DIVIDE THIS COUNTRY ALONG REGIONAL AND TRIBAL LINES. IN THE NORTHERN PART OF SOMALIA, JUST OPPOSITE THE OGADEN, FEELINGS ARE SAID TO RUN ESPECIALLY HIGH. ONE RUMOR IS THAT IN THE CAPITAL OF THE NORTH, HARGEISA, THE RADIO HAS TURNED AGAINST

THE REGIME.

UNDER THOSE CONDITIONS, THE PRESIDENT CAST ABOUT FOR AN INTERNATIONAL SOLUTION. THE RUSSIANS, HAVING BEEN MILKED BY HIM FOR ARMS AND THEN BETRAYED WHEN HE WANTED A GO AT ETHIOPIA, WOULD HAVE NONE OF HIM. HE LEARNED THAT WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR AFTER THE ATTEMPTED COUP.

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AMERICA COULD REALLY HELP WITH ARMS. WEAPONS WOULD SOLVE THE STING OF DEFEAT WITH THE BALM OF A PROMISE THE REGIME MIGHT LIVE TO FIGHT THE ETHIOPIANS SOME OTHER DAY. BUT THE UNITED STATES INSISTED THAT, BEFORE GETTING ARMS, THE PRESIDENT RENOUNCE IN PERPETUITY ANY TERRITORIAL CLAIMS ON OTHER COUNTRIES. HE BALKED AT SIGNING WHAT AMOUNTS TO A QUIT-CLAIM ON LANDS HE COVETS.

THE VISIT TO CHINA IS A WAY OF SEEMING TO TURN DOWN BOTH SUPERPOWERS. BUT THE CHINESE CANNOT REALLY HELP; THEY DON'T HAVE THE WEAPONS OR THE MEANS TO GET THEM HERE ON TIME.

SO MY GUESS IS THAT EVENTUALLY HE WILL BE TURNING BACK TO THE UNITED STATES. WASHINGTON WILL BE ASKED TO PROVIDE SECURITY COVER FOR A NEUTRALIST SOMALIA BACKED BY COMMUNIST CHINA. WHICH IS AN INTRIGUING POSSIBILITY.

2. SOMALIA'S CASE AGAINST THE U.S.

MOGADISHU, SOMALIA - COMMUNIST CHINA SUPPLIES MUCH OF THE SOAP AND TOILET PAPER USED HERE. IT BUILT THIS COUNTRY'S NATIONAL THEATER, NEWST CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AND LONGEST ROAD. BUT THOSE ARE NOT THE REASONS FOR PRESIDENT MOHAMMED SIAD BARRE'S TRIP TO PEKING LAST WEEK.

ON THE CONTRARY, HAVING BROKEN ALREADY WITH THE RUSSIANS, THE PRESIDENT WENT TO PEKING AS A WAY OF TURNING HIS BACK ON THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ARAB ALLIES. HE MADE A BOLT FOR NONALIGNMENT, AND THE REASONS ARE WORTH EXAMINING AS THEY THROW LIGHT ON THE RECENT AND DRASTIC SLIPPING OF AMERICAN INFLUENCE AROUND THE HORN OF AFRICA.

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THE HORN IS A METAPHORICAL TERM FOR TWO COUNTRIES - ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA - WHICH FRINGE THE SOUTHWESTERN

COAST OF THE PASSAGE BETWEEN THE RED SEA AND THE INDIAN

OCEAN. IT HAS LONG BEEN DEEMED STRATEGIC REAL ESTATE - THE MORE SO SINCE THE FLOW OF OIL FROM THE PERSIAN GULF THROUGH THE RED SEA TO THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE BECAME SO IMPORTANT.

MAINTAINING INFLUENCE IN THE HORN HAS BEEN A TRICKY BUSINESS BECAUSE OF BITTER AND UNCEASING CONFLICT OVER THE OGADEN PROVINCE, WHICH ETHIOPIA NOW HOLDS AND SOMALIA CLAIMS. DURING MOST OF THE POSTWAR PERIOD THE UNITED STATES STOOD WITH ETHIOPIA AND EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE. THE SOMALIS MADE AN ALLIANCE WITH RUSSIA, AND BEGAN ACQUIRING ARMS FOR ANOTHER BASH AT THE OGADEN.

IN 1974, HOWEVER, HAILE SELASSIE WAS OVERTHROWN BY A GROUP OF OFFICERS KNOWN AS THE DERGUE. BY 1976 THE DERGUE WAS CLEARLY MOVING TOWARD SOCIALISM AND AWAY FROM THE AMERICAN TIE. THE RUSSIANS SAW THEIR CHANCE AND BEGAN TO SHIFT TOWARD ETHIOPIA AT THE EXPENSE OF SOMALIA.

THE SOMALIS TRIED TO BEAT THEM TO THE PUNCH. IN JULY OF LAST YEAR PRESIDENT SIAD BARRE AUTHORIZED A MAJOR OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE OGADEN. DURING AUGUST THE GOING WAS GOOD. BUT THE RUSSIANS MOVED IN HUGE AMOUNTS OF SUPPLIES AND THOUSANDS OF CUBAN TROOPS. IN SEPTEMBER THEY BLOCKED THE SOMALI ADVANCE. LAST MONTH THEY ROUTED THE SOMALIS AND DROVE THEM FROM THE OGADEN.

FOR THE PAST YEAR SIAD BARRE HAD BEEN MAKING FRIENDLY GESTURES TOWARD THE AMERICANS AND THE ANTI-SOVIET ARAB STATES. BUT THE WARMUP NEVER GOT VERY FAR. THESE ARE THE REASONS AS SEEN FROM THE SOMALI SIDE:

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THE CASE AGAINST THE AMERICANS WAS MADE TO ME BY ADNAN MOHAMMED, A LEADING THEORIST FOR SIAD BARRE. HE TOLD ME: "AMERICA CHANGED ITS MIND SEVEN TIMES. FIRST PRESIDENT CARTER SAID HE WOULD DO 'ANYTHING' TO HELP US. THEN HE SAID THE UNITED STATES WANTED TO TAKE RUSSIA'S PLACE AS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL POWER IN THIS COUNTRY.

"THEN HE OFFERED US ARMS 'IN PRINCIPLE.' THEN HE INSISTED THE ARMS COULD BE ONLY DEFENSIVE. THEN HE REFUSED US ARMS FOR THE OGADEN CAMPAIGN. THEN HE SAID HELP WOULD BE AVAILABLE ONLY IF WE GOT OUT OF OGADEN. THEN HE SAID IT WOULD SURELY COME IF THE ETHIOPIANS AND RUSSIANS INVADDED SOMALIA. FINALLY HE SAID WE HAD TO RENOUNCE FOREVER ALL CLAIMS TO OTHER STATES INCLUDING OGADEN. THAT'S TOO MUCH"

AS TO THE ARABS, SAUDI ARABIA PROMISED MONEY IF THE SOMALIS BROKE WITH THE RUSSIANS, AND EGYPT AND THE SUDAN WERE SUPPOSED TO USE THE MONEY TO FURNISH ARMS. BUT

EGYPT COULD SPARE LITTLE FROM ITS TWO-FRONT STRUGGLE AGAINST LIBYA AND ISRAEL. THE SUDAN WAS LOATH TO BE ACTIVE AGAINST ETHIOPIA WITH ITS CHRISTIAN POPULATION FOR FEAR OF TOUCHING OFF A NEW REVOLT AMONG THE CHRISTIANS DOMINANT IN THE SOUTHERN SUDAN.

THE SAUDIS HAVE MAINTAINED HERE AN AMBASSADOR WHO RECEIVED HIS POST BECAUSE HE WAS BROTHER-IN-LAW TO EX-KING FEISAL'S PHYSICIAN. HE IS A SYRIAN, AND THE SECOND AND THIRD MEMBERS OF HIS MISSION COME FROM THE YEMEN AND INDIA, RESPECTIVELY.

ACCORDING TO THE SOMALIS, THE SAUDI MISSION TOOK MORE THAN IT GAVE. THE TAKE INCLUDED A RAKE-OFF ON AID FUNDS FOR THE BUILDING OF MOSQUES, AND AN ILLEGAL MARK-UP OF UNCLASSIFIED

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THE FEES FOR VISAS GIVEN SOMALIS SEEKING WORK IN SAUDI ARABIA.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THAT, THE SOMALIS NOT SURPRISINGLY FOUND NEUTRAL STATUS ATTRACTIVE. THE RESULT IS THAT THE RUSSIANS COMMAND THROUGH THE ETHIOPIANS A PLACE OF INFLUENCE AROUND THE HORN, WHILE THE WEST AND ITS FRIENDS HAVE MISSED OUT ON THE USUAL COMPENSATION IN SOMALIA.

THAT IS NOT THE END OF THE WORLD NOR EVEN THE END OF A CHANCE FOR SOME INFLUENCE AROUND THE HORN. IN TIME, THE ETHIOPIANS MAY TIRE OF THE RUSSIANS AND TURN TO THE WEST. BUT NOT UNLESS THE ARABS LEARN TO BE A LITTLE MORE SERIOUS IN THEIR DIPLOMACY AND PRESIDENT CARTER A LITTLE MORE STEADY IN HIS POLICY.
CHRISTOPHER

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